



TEXAS RECYCLES DAY

CLEAN TEXAS
2000

Environmental Tips That Help You Take Care of Texas.



Let It Rot! Compost

Every year in Texas, nearly 4 million tons of yard-trimmings in the form of leaves, grass, tree limbs, weeds, and other organic debris end up in Texas landfills. That's about 20 percent of all trash in municipal landfills. It costs Texans about \$250 million a year to collect and landfill yard trimmings. Putting these yard trimmings to use instead of throwing them away makes sense and cents for all Texans.

Composting is one of six recommendations by CLEAN TEXAS 2000

to avoid landfilling and protect water supplies. Other recommended yard care techniques include reusing grass clippings and leaves, mulching, Xeriscaping, common-sense watering, and low-impact pest management.

What is Compost?

Compost is what happens when leaves, grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, wood chips, straw, and small twigs are combined and allowed to break down into a crumbly, dark-brown humus material with soil-like texture.

Bacteria, fungi, and insects break down yard waste. The bacteria and fungi (microbes) need water, air, and food (your yard trimmings) to start and continue the breakdown process.

Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments. By composting and mulching, you can save money by reducing your fertilizer

and landscaping bills, lowering your water bill, and spending less on trash pickups or disposal.

Why Compost?

Composting provides an almost constant source of free fertilizer and soil conditioner. The organic materials in the compost help your plants grow by loosening the soil and allowing better root penetration. Compost increases microbial activity, which creates a healthier environment for plant growth. The texture of compost improves moisture retention in your soil and can reduce your
(over)

Easy Compost Recipe

1. Select a 4-by-8-foot area, preferably shaded, where water does not collect or flow when it rains.
2. Cover half the area with a layer of leaves. Water lightly.
3. Add a thin layer of grass clippings and/or fruit and vegetable scraps, with a dash of old compost or soil. Add water until this layer is soggy.
4. Mix this layer lightly into the layer below with a hoe or cultivator.
5. Top with a thin layer of leaves and water lightly.
6. Repeat steps 3 to 5 as ingredients are available. Never leave food near the surface. Build to 3 feet high as soon as possible.
7. Turn the pile over with a hay fork or shovel every 2 to 3 weeks, adding water as needed to make the whole pile moist like a wrung-out sponge.
8. When space runs out, set the pile aside and start a new pile.

Compost is well-done when the original ingredients are unrecognizable and the material has a mild, earthy aroma. You can screen your compost through $\frac{1}{2}$ " or $\frac{3}{4}$ " wire mesh to get a finer compost; the coarser compost material can be used as mulch or compost starter.



"Why Compost" continued

water bills. Compost has all the nutrients that plants require, unlike chemical fertilizers. Compost even helps moderate the pH of your soil. Through regular use of compost, you can drastically reduce or even eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, which saves money and reduces contamination of our waterways and drinking water.

Materials to Avoid

- ▼ Meat, bones, fish, dairy products, grease and oil tend to cause odors and attract rodents.
- ▼ Pet droppings can harbor diseases.
- ▼ Weeds with seeds or runners may grow when you spread your compost.
- ▼ Diseased and insect-infested plants may spread their problems if not well-composted.

- ▼ Shavings and sawdust from treated wood, and other chemical-laden materials, will introduce contaminants.
- ▼ Ashes are inert and slow the composting process.

Troubleshooting

Bad Odor

Means your compost is too wet or it has too much nitrogen. You should turn it and add wood shavings, wood chips, or dry leaves. If the odor must be stopped fast, do not turn it. Instead, bury it in soil or finished compost. Start another pile.

Not Breaking Down

If your compost is dry, turn it and add water. If it is damp and sweet-smelling, add higher-nitrogen materials like green grass clippings or manure. If it is not hot enough or is warm only deep in the center of the pile,

(it should heat up to over 130 degrees Fahrenheit), you should incorporate materials into a bigger pile or put them into a container.

Flies and Larvae

Pests will be minimized by burying food materials deep in the pile and by keeping its temperature high and its moisture right (like a wrung-out sponge).

Fire Ants

Turn and add water if your compost is dry, or use a low-toxicity bait formulation near but not in the pile.

Source: Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission; Austin Community Gardens; *The Rodale Guide to Composting*, Rodale Press; *Don't Waste Your Wastes -- Compost 'Em*, Sunnyvale Press; *Backyard Composting*, Harmonious Press.